

HEEL-TOUCH FORWARD, TOE-TOUCH BACK

This is a progression of heel-toe strength work, and it requires more balance control than easier versions. The leg swinging from front to back is a balance perturbation that participants will learn to manage as they practice this activity. Arm swings are a natural addition.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Requires postural stability during limb movement and weight shifting.
- ⦿ Enhances elements of gait, including leg swings and heel-toe motion.

Set It Up »

You will not need any special equipment for this exercise.

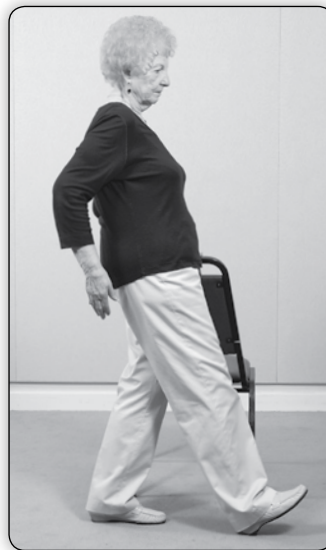
How to Do It »

The Start

- ⦿ Provide participants with adequate balance support. Start with a balance support on both sides, such as standing with a walker or between two chairs. Participants with better balance can use a single balance support.
- ⦿ Participants stand with good posture, feet shoulder-width apart, knees soft.

The Moves

- ⦿ Participants shift weight to the left leg.
- ⦿ They place the right heel out in front on the ground.
- ⦿ They allow the left knee to bend as the forward foot lands. Cue this movement with “Heel.”
- ⦿ They swing the leg behind so that the toes touch down behind. Cue this movement with “Toe.”
- ⦿ On your cue: “Heel,” the leg swings forward; “Toe,” the leg swings backward; and so on.
- ⦿ Repeat 8 to 12 times, as tolerated. Heel, pause, toe, pause, heel, pause, toe, pause, etc. (think Step and Stop on page 237).
- ⦿ Use a deliberate pace that allows them to maintain their balance with each foot placement.
- ⦿ Repeat with the other leg.



Take It Further »

- ⦿ Increase repetitions.
- ⦿ Increase speed or shorten pause times between heel and toe.
- ⦿ Cue more bend from the supporting leg.

Give It More Balance »

- ⦿ Ask participants to focus on how the leg swings affect their balance.
- ⦿ Use fewer balance supports.
- ⦿ Change legs more frequently. Always bring the feet back together before switching.
- ⦿ Add a single-arm swing (hold the balance support with the other hand).
- ⦿ Add swings with both arms.
- ⦿ Use music or counting to set a rhythm.
- ⦿ Place hands on the hips.

Keep It Safe »

This activity takes a fair amount of balance. If participants find that placing the toe behind them is too difficult, have them place the foot beside the other instead of back. Cue it as “Heel, together. Heel, together.” As with many activities, developing a rhythm will make it easier, too.